DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 242 449 RC 014 649

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TITLE Problems and Strategies Regarding Regionalizing Service Delivery: Educational Collaboratives in Rural America.
INSTITUTION Murray State Univ., Ky.
PUB DATE Feb 84
NOTE 55p.; A product of the National Rural Research Project.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Agency Cooperation; Cooperative Planning; *Delivery Systems; Educational Cooperation; Elementary Secondary Education; Information Dissemination; Interdistrict Policies; Literature Reviews; Parent Participation; Program Administration; Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; *Regional Cooperation; Regional Programs; Resource Allocation; *Rural Education; Rural Schools; School District Autonomy; *Shared Services; *Special Education
IDENTIFIERS *Collaboratives

ABSTRACT

A review of five studies by the National Rural Project determined the impact of educational collaboratives on rural special education, including types of educational collaboratives, variations within collaborative structures, benefits of collaboratives for rural special education, problems related to regional service delivery structures, and successful strategies. Predominant types of collaboratives were state-mandated special district systems/educational service agencies, cooperatives formed by local districts, regional/decentralized state education agency systems providing no direct services, and other inter-organizational structures. Major benefits were improved cost efficiency ratios, continuing sense of local autonomy, easier compliance with federal special education mandates, access to program/service specialists, better teacher retention, increased parent involvement, shared information for better planning, non-threatening information exchange, benefits of temporary systems, assessment/reallocation of resources, and conflict resolution. Problems were goal displacement, cumbersome bureaucratic/political structures, reduced district autonomy, inadequate district commitment to special education programs, inappropriate determinations of services, inadequate relationships between collaboratives and districts, staff supervision difficulties, personnel insecurity/dissatisfaction/attrition, difficulties with parents, conflicts between local district members, low district priorities for collaborative special education services, misconceptions about interagency collaboration, fiscal inequalities, difficulties of administrative turnover, conflicting regulatory/monitoring service roles, and inadequacy of collaboratives for some cases of geographic/cultural isolation. (MH)

Problems and Strategies Regarding Regionalizing Service Delivery: Educational Collaboratives In Rural America

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February, 1984

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PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES REGARDING REGIONALIZING SERVICE DELIVERY: EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATIVES IN RURAL AMERICA

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February, 1984

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PREFACE

This report resulted from a request to review studies of the National Rural Project (NRP) to determine the impact of educational collaboratives on rural special education. Raw data and previously reported results from the following NRP studies were reviewed.

1979-81 National Rural Project study of problems and successes in implementing PL 94-142 in rural school systems. This study involved 43 special education cooperatives and 32 LEAs in 21 states.

1980 National Rural Project National Comparative Study of Rural Service Delivery Systems Before and After Implementation of PL 94-142. This study involved 43 special education cooperatives and 32 LEAs in 17 states.

1981 National Rural Project Survey of National Rural Special Education Leadership Conference participants regarding primary service problems in their rural districts/cooperatives. This study involved 56 rural special education administrators.

1982 American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES) Survey of National Rural Special Education Conference participants regarding primary service delivery problems in their districts/ cooperatives. This study involved 60 rural special education administrators.

1983 National Rural Project Study of 200 rural special education administrators in 200 geographically representative rural locations (4 per each of 50 states) regarding rural special education problems and successful strategies of serving students with disabilities.

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PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES REGARDING REGIONALIZING SERVICE DELIVERY: EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATIVES IN RURAL AMERICA

INTRODUCTION

Educational collaboratives are designed to enhance or provide regional educational services. Organizational arrangements range from informal agreements between two or more local school districts to state education agency-imposed regional structures with regulatory or service orientations.

Collaboratives of all types offer opportunities for cost savings via shared staff, programs, media centers, computer services, staff development programs, personnel, and other resources. Regional structures provide local rural districts the benefits of joining together for services while maintaining the advantages of remaining small. This is especially true when a collaborative structure is designed to include a great deal of local district autonomy regarding how services are provided.

In spite of a relative lack of research regarding educational collaboratives, regional structures such as cooperatives and intermediate units have been steadily increasing in numbers and functions. Primary impetuses have included desires for efficient service delivery (economies of scale or the desire to combat inflation), the desire to enhance effectiveness by pooling single district resources for common purposes, pressures from parents and state education agencies, and federal incentives.

With regard to rural special education, the primary federal regulation credited with promoting the establishment of collaboratives

has been the requirement of Public Law 94-142 that any local district with too few eligible children to qualify for a $7,500 allocation of federal funds would receive no direct pass-through funds from their state education agency. This encouraged numerous small rural districts to form or join special education cooperatives so that a true continuum of services could exist and students with low-incidence disabilities could receive appropriate services.

Activities designed to provide appropriate education for students with disabilities have fostered cooperation among smaller school districts. Even before enactment of PL 94-142, a number of states foresaw the need for mandatory special education legislation and collected prevalence data regarding students with disabilities. These states found that a student population of 15,000 or more is required to provide cost-effective categorical programs in most special areas. Some programs, such as those for deaf-blind students, require an even larger student population. As a result, these states established cooperative arrangements, including the Regional Education Service Agencies of Iowa, the Joint Agreements of Illinois, and the BOCES of New York.

Additionally, voluntary collaboration is becoming more common. For example, a study (Helge, 1980) of rural school administrators indicated that rural school districts that were not required to join or form a cooperative (i.e., the district had a sufficient number of handicapped students that it was entitled to request $7,500) were electing to do so. Respondents reported that district administrators felt that cooperative administrative structures would enable them to better serve their students with disabilities. (Some districts shared as few as one educator or specialist such as an itinerant speech therapist.)

While respondents in 61% of the states involved in an 1980 NRP survey indicated that their states mandated interdistrict collaboration, only 38% reported that positive incentives for collaboration were provided by their states. Instead, 73% of the respondents reported that their primary incentive was their "desire to enhance service delivery." Less than one-third (27%) reported that their incentives stemmed from the $7,500 mandate of PL 94-142.

Emerging trends of voluntary collaboration (Naisbitt, 1983, Howe, 1981, Helge, 1980) and service vs. regulatory orientations (Howe, 1981) have been identified.

Thus, in this decade, rural special education programs are frequently enacted in unique regional organizational environments. Traditional patterns of school or district level educational assessment, planning, service delivery, and monitoring are being replaced. Decisions regarding rural students are more often being made by organizations at higher levels, and the ramifications have been both positive and negative.

In its simplest form, a collaborative stems from an informal agreement between two or more school districts to cooperatively accomplish one or more tasks. Regional structures can also involve cooperative agreements between districts and a decentralized or intermediate state education agency. Educational collaboratives are organized to assess needs, plan, implement, or evaluate student services. As a regional administrative structure becomes more formalized and organized, with its own staff, its operations tend to become more removed from the control of its constituents and member districts.

This is because of the typical differentiation of the roles of local school districts from those of regional collaboratives. A local school district's primary responsibilities are to deliver programs and services directly to students. A regional structure typically is primarily responsible for coordination and delivery of services to member districts and staffs. At the third level, the state department is primarily responsible for policymaking, enforcement of statutes and regulations, and relevant data gathering. These three levels of emphasis are depicted in Figure 1 below.

DIVERGENT LEVELS OF EMPHASIS

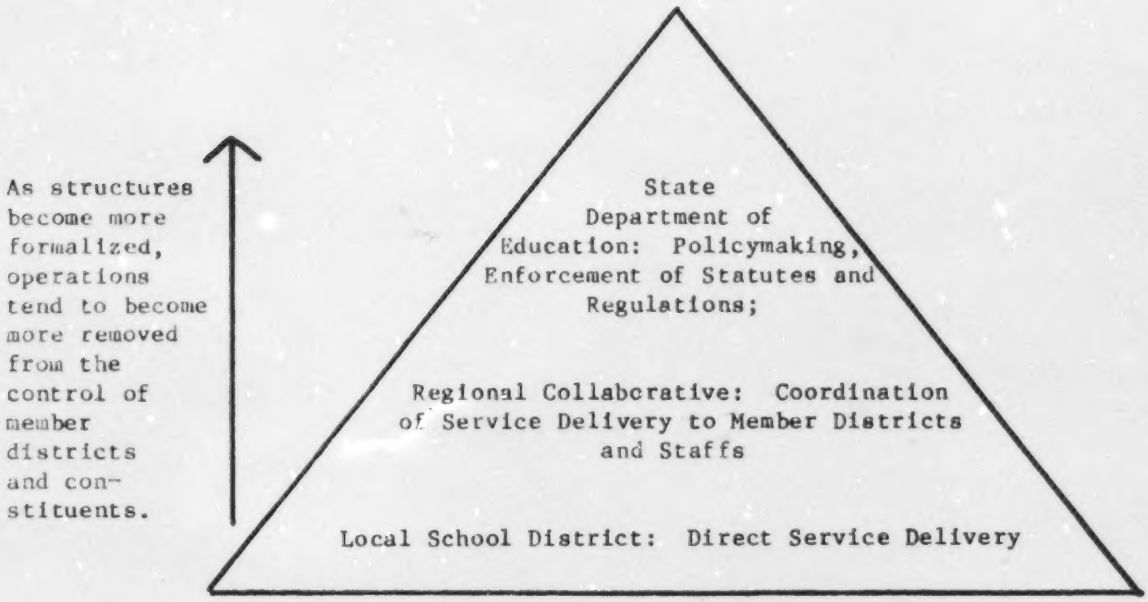
As structures become more formalized, operations tend to become more removed from the control of member districts and constituents.
State Department of Education: Policymaking, Enforcement of Statutes and Regulations;
Regional Collaborative: Coordination of Service Delivery to Member Districts and Staffs
Local School District: Direct Service Delivery

Figure 1

TYPES OF EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATIVES

The organizational structures of collaboratives vary from state-mandated special district systems with massive funding and large special education staffs to agreements between two or more local education agencies to share particular services.

Collaboratives are best categorized by function because the terminology used by various states to describe regional structures is inconsistent. Major functional variations regard the scope of program involvement, governance, fiscal bases, and organizational structures. Some collaboratives serve only rural areas and some serve districts of any size and area in their region. The foci of collaboratives varies from regulatory to service provision, with some emphasizing the elimination of district paperwork and even furnishing grantwriters for local districts.

The predominant types of collaboratives include:

1. state-mandated special district systems and education service agencies
2. cooperatives formed by the initiation of local districts
3. regional or decentralized state education agency systems providing no direct services
4. other inter-organizational structures.

Most collaboratives are relatively new developments that came into existence during the past two decades. Well-known exceptions are the pioneering New York BOCES. Almost all states have collaboratives of some kind and some states have exerted strong leadership, practically mandating some of their districts to become involved in cooperative arrangements. Although all types of collaboratives can serve urban and rural districts, their impact is probably greater in rural areas because rural schools typically have fewer resources to meet educational needs.

Each primary type of collaborative structure is briefly described below.

1. State-mandated special district systems and education service agencies.

The primary orientation of these collaboratives is service delivery. Examples include the New York BOCES and intermediate education units such as those in Pennsylvania. A study by Mack and Stephens (1979) indicated that special district service agencies such as the state-mandated systems in New York and Pennsylvania have made more significant contributions of programs and services to public school districts than have most regionalized and cooperative state education agency networks (decentralized state education agencies). Mack and Stephens (1979) attributed that to the fact that most special districts have a more comprehensive, faster-growing staff than do regionalized and cooperative education service agency networks.

2. Cooperatives formed by local district initiation.

Agreements are made in such collaboratives for two or more districts to share services to a greater or lesser degree or to contract for instruction for an individual student. (Examples include the special education cooperatives in Kansas and Arkansas.) Some cooperatives have a stable administrative district and some rotate this district on a set or periodic basis.

This classification includes cooperatives that are totally voluntary and those that are encouraged because of the requirement of PL 94-142 that districts must apply for a minimum of $7,500 in funds for their handicapped programs. Some states formed cooperatives only because of this requirement and had no services for some types of disabilities previous to the formation of such cooperatives. In fact, cooperatives with special education as a focus have mushroomed since the 1975 passage of PL 94-142. Cooperative structures vary tremendously in governance systems and in geographic scope, but most were designed to ameliorate the difficulties of providing a continuum of services in rural schools. Of particular concern were problems serving students with low-incidence disabilities.

3. Regional or decentralized state education agency systems.

This classification refers to decentralized extensions of state education agencies that do not provide direct services. An example is the educational collaboratives of the state of Massachusetts.

4. Other inter-organizational structures.

These include: (a) districts having contracts with private or community agencies, (b) cooperatives having agreements with other cooperatives, (c) cooperatives and single districts having service agreements, (d) inter-state collaboratives including those structured through regional resource centers or cross-funded federal-state structures such as facets of tribal service agreements of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, (e) other unique arrangements designed to provide services to extremely remote areas such as recently organized state-funded limited purpose regional resource centers in Arkansas or Alaska, and (f) models with overlapping interdisciplinary approaches for service delivery which encompass interdisciplinary teams at local and state levels. The latter type is primarily used in predominantly rural states including Vermont.

NRP research and literature reviews indicated that a majority of these types of collaboratives were issue or project specific.

Most of the four primary collaboratives described above were not specifically designed to serve students with disabilities. However, some types such as the Texas education service districts, were designed with rural and regional service needs in mind. A study (Mack and Stephens, 1979) of educational collaboratives (which was not limited to organizations serving rural areas) indicated that special education services were a universal priority of collaboratives. In fact, this study determined that over one-third of the expenditures of all of the systems they studied were related to special education. Special education staff constituted nearly one-half of the total staff for all agencies. (Mack and Stephens, 1979.)

There are important variations in the types and methods of services provided, based on the type of organizational unit. State-established special districts tend to provide the greatest range of services and employ the largest staffs. Decentralized state education agencies provide no direct services to children. Cooperatives tend to use a combination of shared local programs and directly sponsored services.

VARIATIONS WITHIN COLLABORATIVE STRUCTURES

Intermediate education units are sometimes state formed and financed and sometimes created and supported by local and regional services of specialists, to procure help in curriculum matters and to gain access to large media centers stocked with modern equipment and software. The regulatory powers of the intermediate units are contingent upon their formation. If the collaborative is state initiated, it typically functions as an arm of state government working with the schools. If it was locally formed, it functions primarily as a service unit.

Special education cooperatives and the regional structures depicted in No. 4 above are the only types that have been organized specifically to meet special education services needs. However, many special education cooperatives have special education administrators with no training in special education.

The degree of the organizational structure of collaboratives also varies tremendously. For example, the first regional administrative structure in the state of Maine designed to focus on special education programs was initiated in the 1977-78 academic year. No special legislation was required. A regional special education director and associated staff were not employed. Thus almost all monies were used to directly serve the targeted handicapped student population (Shulman and Doughty, 1983.,

Some states organize their cooperatives by student population. For example, one state required a basic student population of 15,000; thus cooperatives in the state involved divergent numbers of counties. Organizational structures and requirements sometimes vary significantly

within a given state. This is particularly true in states in which districts have total freedom of choice concerning joining a cooperative.

BENEFITS OF COLLABORATIVES FOR RURAL SPECIAL EDUCATION

Participants in the federally-sponsored Rural Conversations Seminar (Jacobson, 1979) concluded that various forms of collaboratives were demonstrating potential for delivering services to rural schools. The conference report stated that this was particularly true regarding high cost support services for populations such as students with disabilities.

For a variety of reasons and incentives, collaboratives are formed or accessed with the view that small rural districts will be better able to offer a true continuum of services. This is especially true regarding programming for students who have disabilities of low incidence, a program area NRP researchers were told was "underdeveloped." (Helge, 1981.)

Table I depicts the advantages of regional special education service delivery identified in NRP research.

Table I

MAJOR BENEFITS OF REGIONAL SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICE DELIVERY

Improved Cost Efficiency Ratios

Maintenance of a Sense of Local Autonomy

Facilitation of Compliance with Federal Special Education Mandates

Access to Program and Service Specialists

Facilitation of Teacher Retention

Enhancement of Parent Involvement

Shared Information for Better Planning

Non-Threatening Information Exchange

Benefits of Temporary Systems

Assessment and Reallocation of Resources

By Products of Conflict Resolution

Each major benefit that has been identified is described below.

1. Improved Cost Efficiency Ratios.

Rural schools have generic difficulties of providing economical specialized programs in small school units. NRP research has consistently identified "funding inadequacies" as a significant problem for rural local districts. In fact, according to 74% of those sampled in a 1983 survey of 200 geographically representative rural special education administrators, funding inadequacies were a serious problem for their rural district. (Helge, 1984.) Furthermore, a second analysis of data collected for 1978-983 NRP studies indicated that smaller districts tended to have the greatest funding problems. Respondents reported that this was because of the expenses involved in transportation, obtaining services of specialists, etc.

The cost per unit of specialized services is higher in rural areas than in urban areas due to less professional resources available, transportation barriers, and other attributes of rural areas. (Offices of Rural and Human Development, 1975; Rosenfeld, 1981.) A 1979 study of the National School Boards Association indicated that small school dis-

tricts had experienced the sharpest increases in special education costs of all U.S. districts (Education of the Handicapped, June 20, 1979).

Estimates of populations bases required for a rural district to cost-efficiently provide a continuum of special education services, including segregated special education classes, have ranged as high as 50,000 students (Isenberg, 1970, Kidd, 1970). Only 50% of all U.S. school districts can meet the 8,000-10,000 population criterion established by Kohl and Marlo (1971). In fact, nearly 76% of the school districts in the U.S. have total pupil enrollments under 2,500. (Barker, 1983.) Due to the significant barriers posed by the geographic nature or remoteness of many of these schools, (e.g., isolation caused by mountains, deserts, and islands), unique service delivery models are required so that service delivery becomes more affordable or approaches cost-efficiency.

Respondents in NRP studies from 1978-83 have indicated that collaboratives facilitate cost savings because of the opportunities to share staff, programs, inservice, and other resources. Additionally, respondents also reported that collaboratives facilitate the design of cost-efficient strategies and systems when individuals from various districts openly discuss ineffective strategies. This sharing contributes to savings and to the redistribution of funds to more effective programs or strategies.

2. Maintenance of a Sense of Local Autonomy.

Educational collaboratives have been fairly consistently promulgated as vehicles through which human, technical, and material resources could be provided without school consolidation (Sher, 1977, 1978). In fact, regional structures offer acceptable compromises between the need for consolidation to efficiently provide services and the preference for autonomy. Because each district stays in tact, local automony is not totally surrendered, and the values of smallness are therefore not lost. Depending on the state structure, school districts can obtain needed services without large additional expenditures (e.g., where the state is the chief source of education service agency operating funds). Usually, the local districts have influence, at least to some degree, on decisions concerning service provisions. Collaboratives can also maintain a service orientation rather than overemphasizing regulatory functions.

3. Facilitation of Compliance with Federal Special Education Mandates.

A study by Weber and Rockoff (1980) related compliance with the provisions of PL 94-142 to the total number of students enrolled in a school district. The investigators stated that larger districts and collaboratives could be more flex-

ible and adapt as needed to meet PL 94-142 mandates. Study results regarding compliance are indirectly related to district membership in collaboratives. Similar respondents in NRP studies, including the national study comparing rural special education services before and after implementation of PL 94-142, (Helge, 1980) reported greater compliance with federal special education mandates after their districts became involved with special education cooperatives.

4. Access to Program and Service Specialists.

Regional structures enable smaller school systems to enjoy some of the same educational advantages of their larger counterparts. This is particularly true when the smaller school systems are geographically isolated. Thus staff report that collaboratives reduce educational inequities otherwise borne by the students and teaching staff of small rural areas. This is most obvious in increased services to students with low-incidence disabilities.

A well-staffed collaborative may supply direct services to students (e.g., actually teaching students with disabilities) or indirect services like inservice training, curriculum planning, achievement testing, etc. Collaboratives help overcome the rural problem of too few support programs and restricted curricula by linking the rural district/service providers with expertise, technology, and training often available only in areas with larger populations.

5. Facilitation of Teacher Retention.

Although staff recruitment and retention remain two of the foremost problems in rural special education (experienced by 66% and 64% respectively, of those surveyed in a 1983 NRP survey (Helge, 1984), teacher retention can be facilitated by a regional delivery system. Teachers who receive assistance from regional personnel are more likely to remain in their positions than those in single districts who are expected to be "all things to all people," providing most services alone. (Fritz, 1982, Helge, 1983.)

6. Enhancement of Parent Involvement.

Parent involvement can be facilitated by membership in a collaborative. It is possible for some students to be served in their local district who otherwise would have to be sent outside of the district or even placed in a residential center. Many collaboratives provide a structure involving frequent home visitations in which regional specialists work directly with parents in implementing a student's IEP.

7. Shared Information for Better Planning.

Collaboration between personnel of cooperating districts allows representatives of local rural areas to survey more options and to select choices to be reviewed by local populations. Typically, small size, less formal structure, and less long-range planning characterize many rural programs. A small staff or school board many reflect "consensus" by casual agreement with an acknowledged leader's opinion. If collaboration can be effected with a planning project or agency that serves a small district that effectively uses long-range planning, another district in the collaborative may also recognize the value of planning and the possible use of regional personnel for assistance.

8. Non-Threatening Information Exchange.

Collaboration between districts with similar special projects or needs allows the exchange of information in a non-threatening manner that may reveal deficiencies and problems to be addressed. As districts feel comfortable sharing failures as well as successes, other districts can benefit, omitting repetition of errors. Agency collaboration typically results in the indirect sharing of information about attempted programs whose results failed to meet expectations. This sharing may contribute to substantial cost savings.

9. Benefits of Temporary Systems.

Formal collaboration may initiate the organization of "ad hoc cooperatives" for special projects. When a task is completed, the ad hoc cooperative can disband. Leadership external to a district may provide new motivations within a district while it is assisting with new models or procedures for service delivery. Having facilitated new indigenous rural leadership, temporary assistance providers can then go elsewhere.

10. Assessment and Reallocation of Resources.

A conscious effort to collaborate may make organizations cognizant of the saturation of resources, approaches, or programs in a given area. Such knowledge may prompt redistribution or reapportionment so that unserved areas may be reached. Monies saved from questionable information programs can be applied elsewhere. This will also assist in beginning to address the inequities of resources among various units of the collaborative.

11. By Products of Conflict Resolution.

Conflict is endemic to interagency collaboration, particularly among districts having histories of local autonomy. Confrontation and resolution of differences of opinion are essential if a collaborative is to function. Conflict resolution has been reported as responsible for establishing inter-

personal bonds across local district boundaries. These bonds have been used to facilitate support for new program development activities.

PROBLEMS RELATED TO REGIONAL SRVICE DELIVERY STRUCTURES

While regionalized service delivery has allowed a greater range of special education and related services to be provided with fewer personnel than would be the case when offered by individual districts, collaboratives have definitely not offered panaceas. Regionalized special education has often resulted in arguments over the locus of decison-making control, the location of the unit, personnel choices, loss of community pride and ownership in programs, and higher transportation costs.

Centralized services have frequently amplified bussing problems. Savings accrued from serving larger numbers of students have sometimes been negated by greater costs of transportation, more drivers and fuel, and faster bus depreciation.

An analysis of NRP studies led to the identification of a number of concerns about the operation of collaboratives. These concerns are depicted in Table II below.

Table II

PROBLEMS FACILITATED OR EXACERBATED BY
REGIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY STRUCTURES

Goal Displacement

Cumbersome Bureaucratic and Political Structures

Reduced Local District Autonomy

Inadequate District Commitment to Special Education Programs

Inappropriate Determinations of Services

Inadequate Relationships Between the Collaborative and Each District

Difficulties With Staff Supervision

Personnel Insecurity and Dissatisfaction

Personnel Attrition

Difficulties Involving Parents

Conflicts Between Local District Members of a Collaborative

Low District Priorities Regarding Special Education Services Offered by the Collaborative

Misconceptions Regarding the Realities of Interagency Collboration

Fiscal Inequities

Difficulties Posed by Administrative Turnover

Conflicting Regulatory/Monitoring and Service Roles

Inadequacies of the Collaborative Model for Some Instances of Geographic and Cultural Isolation

Each major concern is briefly discussed below.

1. Goal Displacement.

Goal displacement occurs when an emphasis on cost efficiency becomes the overriding goal of an administrative structure and individual child needs are placed at a lower priority level. Goal displacement also occurs when regulatory functions take precedence over the service orientation of the collaborative. A caveat seems to be necessary to maintain foci on the true purposes of the collaborative.

2. Cumbersome Bureaucratic and Political Structures.

Bureaucratic layers and political structures designed with the intention of facilitating services can isolate the student needing services from them and unnecessarily involve service providers in political battles. The existence of multiple governing boards (within each LEA and for the collaborative as a whole) is usually cumbersome. For example, planning is difficult in structures in which budget figures are not available until just prior to the new year because each year requires new decisions at the LEA level regarding the extent of involvement for the new year. This kind of operation inhibits recruitment of new staff and planning in general.

Politics intervene in some collaboratives to the extent that some "cooperatives" involved in NRP studies did not entail sharing of programs, services, or personnel. Districts had withdrawn from special education cooperatives in some states because of dissatisfaction with service delivery.

3. Reduced Local District Autonomy.

Many rural districts found regional service delivery threatening to the standard of local autonomy as regional decision-making frequently took place without the advice of district officials and parents. Typically, administrators of the largest school districts in a non-volundary collaborative are the most dissatisfied because of their desires for the district to maintain control over their own special education personnel. Administrators frequently argue that this violates good management practices of decentralization and advocate that the collaborative is more appropriate for smaller districts with insufficient numbers of children to hire specialized personnel.

4. Inadequate District Commitment to Special Education Programs.

Because most collaboratives were initiated to address unmet needs and provide specialized services, they are not typically an integral part of the entire educational system.

This limited scope of program involvement places the collaborative and its leadership personnel apart from the other major business of the regular school system. Thus, regional personnel and the students they serve are frequently accorded "second class citizenship." Obviously, this can negatively affect mainstreaming efforts.

Many regional staff hired by collaboratives were concerned that district personnel were abrogating their responsibilities toward the handicapped by allocating all responsibility for handicapped students to the regional structure. They felt a need for better education and commitment of district personnel in understanding their roles in complying with PL 94-142. Some respondents reported inappropriate dependence upon regional specialists and staff. Some stated that a lack of local district involvement in special education programs was contributing to them serving as a "dumping ground" for students with problems. Many collaborative staff reported that districts expected to simply pay a contracted fee which would free the district from further responsibility for service delivery. Respondents stated that such attitudes inhibited mainstreaming of handicapped students.

Respondents also stated that local "ownership" and commitment were destroyed in instances in which an itinerant staff member (e.g., a physical therapist) hired by the collaborative was the only person legally allowed to deliver certain services.

According to Howe, regional agencies that serve large and small districts can actually inhibit integration of special education. Although individual large districts hire their own special education personnel and some special education personnel are hired by the smaller districts, most of the regional service agency personnel are specialized ancillary personnel (e.g., school psychologists, speech and language clinicians, school social workers, consultants, audiologists, and itinerant teachers). Coordinators for the larger major functions provided by the regional service agency are not instructional programs as much as they are responsible for determining special education eligibility, monitoring special education programs, providing consultation to districts, and directly administering some of the low prevalence programs.

Such factors contribute to difficulties identifying the person responsible for service delivery. Local district resource room personnel frequently feel that they are incapable of serving or mainstreaming severely disabled students who are usually served by the regional specialists. Thus, local services are frequently inappropriately confined to those for mildly and moderately disabled students.

5. Inappropriate Determinations of Services.

The separate fiscal status of districts and the collaborative can cause instability. This is particularly true when the collaborative requires a district to purchase services. The types of services offered, their quality, scheduling, or the program emphasis may be determined after considering financial needs rather than those of students. Likewise, determination of the location of services may be based on politics or availability of space vs. the most appropriate location for students with disabilities.

6. Inadequate Relationships Between the Collaborative and Each District.

Careful consideration must be given to establishing effective relationships between the collaborative and each district in regular as well as special education matters. This includes lines of accountability for all personnel hired by the collaborative to work with some or all districts involved. For example, it is wise to discuss guidelines for dividing service time for collaborative personnel among various duties and districts at an early stage. Some collaboratives find it effective to allocate district costs for the collaborative staff on the basis of the amount of time spent in service delivery in a particular district, and other districts prefer that staff be paid on an equally split basis, no matter where services were delivered. Such operational philosophies are best decided when the structure is initiated.

Staff of districts that were part of collaboratives frequently expressed problems determining which staff member/district is responsible for assisting a particular student. A common complaint was that informal procedures frequently differed dramatically from those depicted by the formal organizational chart.

7. Difficulties with Staff Supervision.

Many collaborative personnel are concerned with the abilities of shared personnel to cover vast distances effectively, such as extremes of 24,000 square miles and entire islands. Many special education supervisory staff hired by the collaboratives are unable to hire, advise, or supervise special educators. Many special education personnel become accountable to the building principal once they enter that individual's domain.

Supervision of services is frequently based on the least expensive alternative. Supervisors are sometimes identified after determining who is available or politically acceptable. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to implement fair evaluation procedures.

8. Personnel Insecurity and Dissatisfaction.

Special education administrators and itinerant staff employed by regional units tend to feel less professional security than those hired by single districts. Role ambiguity is particularly problemmatic. Problems range from determining which specialist has a needed area of expertise to delineating lines of responsibility.

The roles of itinerant staff appear to be the least understood. Many regular educators stated that they were envious of "the time off" that itinerant staff had when traveling vast distances in inclement weather. Itinerants reported working in ill-equipped regional areas, in boiler rooms, and in other facilities reserved for the "part-time staff member."

A majority of itinerant staff stated that non-itinerant staff did not fully understand needs that itinerants have for time off, answering telephone calls, writing and proofing reports, consulting with other team members, attending staff meetings, and conducting other atypical responsibilities. Many specialists clearly felt that they alone understood their roles and had no one within their district/collaborative with whom to confide their frustrations.

Because itinerants are not seen as part of any schools or part of the collaborative management team, they experience no control over decisions about their work. Because of their separation from the communities in which they work, they frequently do not know how to approach the local community power and communication systems and are poorly accepted. The supervisor in charge of evaluating their performance may be located days away from their work site, and they may have differences of opinion with the building principal. Differences in salary levels between district or regional staff or between involved private and public schools are often points of contention.

Some states will not pay itinerants for the time they spend in traveling. Itinerants working in culturally different villages frequently report dissatisfactions such as the requirements to eat indigenous foods. Many itinerant staff report no available accomodations other than housing in the homes of students. Precious travel time is frequently wasted when parents who are not interested in working with outsiders do not attend scheduled conferences.

9. Personnel Attrition

Attrition of qualified itinerant staff and other specialists is a chronic problem related to the staff dissatisfaction reported above. (Helge, 1984, 1981).

Regional intinerants receive less reinforcement on the job. However, special education teachers in cooperatives are more likely to remain in their positions than teachers in districts which must provide most of their own services. (Fritz, 1982, Helge, 1981).

Many regional service models evolved because of transportation difficulties such as poor roads, climatic difficulties, flooding, and travel time constraints. In fact, one Montana cooperative was designed for the purpose of "enhancing staff morale and improving staff retention." However, travel constraints remain a problem for the itinerant and contribute to staff attrition.

10. Difficulties Involving Parents.

Regional structures can facilitate involvement by allowing more students with low-incidence disabilities to be served in a regional (vs. residential) school program. However, when the regional programs are located great distances from the students' homes and regular home visits are not a specific responsibility of a staff member, collaboratives can actually decrease parent involvement. In fact, parent involvement and communication becomes more difficult as services are removed further from the local school building. Situations requiring child travel to a centralized service facility inadvertently exclude many parents from participation with the child's program or teacher. Some districts in widespread collaboratives actually lack a real sense of "community."

Programs that are not designed with local norms and cultures in mind also inhibit parent involvement. Many rural parents are wary of "outsiders" (e.g., itinerant staff) who appear occassionally for short periods of time to instruct their children or recommend actions for parents.

11. Conflicts Between Local District Members of a Collaborative.

The quality of services is often inconsistent across units of a collaborative because of variations in staff competency and staff development programs.

Differences in standards or requirements between districts, private schools, or agencies also threaten consistency. Inconsistency of communications from federal and state levels to various districts can cause differences of opinion regarding actions that should be taken. Divergent guidelines and levels of local commitment to interagency agreements or the funding of non-public school placements, differences in salary levels of district and regional staff or between involved private and public schools, or differences of opinion regarding funding and services criteria and service eligiblity definitions can result in inflexible or conflicting standards and violations of PL 94-142 requirements.

Hidden agendas are prolific in collaboratives because each district feels ultimately responsible to his/her local community. True change across a collaborative is difficult in the midst of competing local priorities.

Sometimes local school boards resist cooperation because of personalities involved, sports competitions, statewide or intra-collaborative offices/favors being sought, etc. If districts become polarized, cooperative projects may be doomed to failure because acceptance by one group assures rejection by the other.

12. Low District Priorities Regarding Special Education Services Offered by the Collaborative

It is frequently difficult to maintain stable service delivery sites in buildings or districts. District administrators frequently require the cooperative's special education programs to physically move, even to another district within the cooperative. This further inhibits integration of handicapped students into the mainstream of the activities of member districts.

13. Misconceptions Regarding the Realities of Interagency Collaboration.

According to Baker (1980), traditional values of interagency relationships (e.g., high consensus levels, voluntary formation, and equal exchanges of resources) may facilitate "antagonistic cooperation" and districts may neglect service delivery while battling among themselves.

14. Fiscal Inequities.

Some costs, such as transportation to centralized programs, can actually increase via regional programs.

When the collaborative is funded (by the state department or by districts) on the basis of the types of personnel delivering services, vs. the types of services offered, no allowances are made for the extra costs of serving students with multiple needs. Thus, the high costs associated with extra transportation, tuition for private placement, etc., are not met in an equitable fashion.

When services depend on the amount of PL 94-142 flow-through money contributed to the collaborative, the smallest districts, sometimes the most remote and needing services the most, suffer regarding the amount of services received. Collaboratives that organize so that services will be delivered on a first come first served basis foster service inequities. Such a system also encourages overreferral.

15. Difficulties Posed By Administrative Turnover.

Because rural systems tend to favor informal agreements and informal ways of implementating agreements, leadership turnover frequently inhibits service delivery.

16. Conflicting Regulatory/Monitoring and Service Roles.

Collaboratives that are assigned dual roles (providing technical assistance as well as monitoring) by state education agencies are placed in positions of automatic conflict. While such an arrangement is easier for a state department (e.g., communicating to one agent vs. many local district personnel), participating districts typically view directors of such collaboratives as "agents of the state," rather than of the collaborative or district.

17. Inadequacies of the Collaborative Model for Some Instances of Geographic and Cultural Isolation.

The collaborative model is sometimes of little benefit. Even after maximum redistricting or cooperative organization has been accomplished, the distribution of students needing services in some remote sparsely populated areas is such that the usual means of transporting them daily to any type of specialized group instruction is infeasible.

With only a few handicapped students in a vast area, costs and logistics can become staggering. Bussing of students or use of cooperative arrangements among districts are out of the question. For one thing, distances are generally too vast. For another, even when villages are situated within a few miles of one another, inclement weather can make traveling even a short distance impossible. Loss of cultural identity/determination is also possible in areas in which a minority student would be transported from a native village to be educated with those of a majority culture.

SUMMARY

A number of conditions inherent in regional service delivery structures facilitate the problems listed in Table II. These include the limited special purposes of educational collaboratives, role and function ambiguities, geographic and professional isolation, separate governance and fiscal status, and the resulting complexity of inter-organizational relationships.

As illustrated in Figure 2 below, NRP respondents in numerous studies reported that the benefits of collaboration (see Table I) decreased as local autonomy and input decreased. Interviewers also perceived that local commitment to regional special education programs was related to high degrees of local autonomy and input.

RELATIONSHIP OF LOCAL AUTONOMY, INPUT AND
COMMITMENT TO PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION

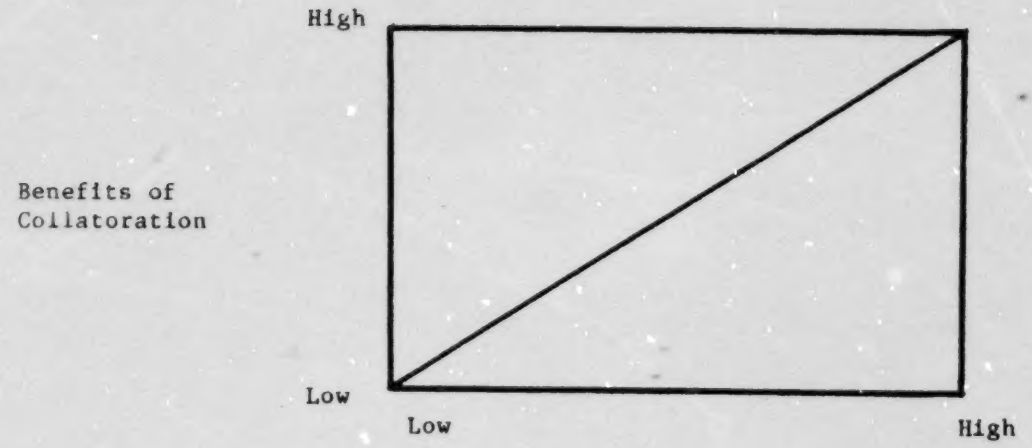

Figure 2.

As regional structures became more formalized, operations tended to become more removed from the control of member districts and constituents. However, the degree of local autonomy could not be correlated with a specific type of collaborative. Rather, the cardinal principal appeared to be implementation of procedures designed to ensure local input and foster local commitment.

According to respondents, this basically meant use of centralized authority only when absolutely necessary. This premise is consistent with rural value systems which deplore unnecessary formality and bureaucracy, support local involvement, and take pride in local accomplishments. Activities such as public debates and advisory boards composed of representatives of member districts were reported to be particularly effective.

Figure 3 below illustrates that local involvement in collaborative decision making is also related to the degree of resistance to change when special educators attempt program innovations. Conservatism and the valuing of traditional approaches have been found to be inhibitors to comprehensive rural special education programming. Adept regional administrators will attempt to prevent resistance by meaningful involvement of local staff in regional decision making.

EFFECTS OF MEMBERSHIP IN A COLLABORATIVE ON A LOCAL DISTRICT'S RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Increased Resistance	Decreased Resistance
Collaborative staff make all decisions and impose them on local districts.	Regional staff involve district leadership personnel as advisors and in decision making.

Figure 3.

Depending on the administrative style of the collaborative, a "benefit" of regional service delivery can become a "problem," or vice-versa. The example of parent involvement is noted in Figure 4 below.

EFFECTS OF REGIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY
ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Factors Necessary to Enhance Parent Involvement	Factors Which Decrease Parent Involvement
1. Students can be clustered for services or served by an itinerant, enabling students with severe and other low-incidence handicaps to be served locally vs. at a residential facility.	1. Long distances from regional services to students' homes.
2. Administrative guidelines clarify who is responsible for parent education and home visits.	2. Collaborative staff are "outsiders" without understanding of the local community and have no involvement other than occasional service delivery for short periods of time.
3. Collaborative staff make home visits. Regional specialists work directly with parents in implementing IEPs.	3. Collaborative does not involve local community power structure in decision making.
4. Itinerants become involved in, and more accepted by, students' communities.	4. Local parents are not involved in regional advisory boards.
5. Collaborative staff understand local power and communication structures.	5. Educational value system or processes of collaborative vary significantly from those in the local district.
6. Collaborative decision making boards and forums involve parents and other community members (particularly members of local power structure) as well as district-level staff.	6. Responsibilities for home visits and other work with parents in community are non-existent or ill defined.
	7. Local district is not integrally involved in decision making regarding regional services.
	8. Local administrators voice dissatisfaction with the functioning of regional services or collaborative structure.

Figure 4.

Likewise, regional structures can have a positive, negative, or "no" effect on variables such as teacher retention. Figure 5 is illustrative.

EFFECTS OF COLLABORATIVE STRUCTURE
ON TEACHER RETENTION VARIABLE

Increase Retention	No Effect On Retention	Decrease Retention
Itinerant or consulting specialists assist isolated generic teachers who lack other specialized resources.	District teachers are reared in local rural communities or are married to "permanent" community members.	Itinerant teachers experience extensive travel demands, scheduling problems, role ambiguities, inadequate "part time facilities," little input into decisions affecting their work, and lack of understanding of peers, parents or local community.

Figure 5.

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

As analysts of futuristic trends forecast more networking and interagency collaboration (Naisbitt, 1983) and scholars of regional educational structures anticipate the formation of additional collaboratives (Howe, 1981), the field can expect the use or formation of collaboratives to increase. Whether a regional structure is regulatory or service oriented in nature and whether organized from the state or grass roots level, some strategies may tend to increase its effectiveness. Strategies that have been reported to facilitate the effectiveness of collaboratives are listed in Table III below.

Table III

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL REGIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY

Legislative/Regulatory Agency Support

Appropriate Geographic Scope

Governing Structure Facilitating Achievement of Collaborative's Goals and Objectives

Allowance for Divergent Goals of Each Unit of the Collaborative

Clear Procedures for Service Delivery

Equitable Service Delivery Systems

Appropriate Lines of Staff Accountability

Effective Planning Based on Evaluation Data

Effective Communication Systems

Local District Responsibility for Special Education Services

Appropriate Involvement of the Public in Decision Making

Creation of Local Support for Change

Collaboration with Agencies External to Collaborative

Realistic and Effective Intra-Agency Collaboration

Facilitation of Parent Involvement

Emphasis on Retention of Qualified Personnel

Comprehensive Staff Development Programs

Creative Uses of Advanced Technologies

Each strategy is briefly described below.

1. Legislative/Regulatory Agency Support.

It is rare that a collaborative is technically (according to the formal organizational chart) independent from state or federal lines of accountability. Even in such instances, it behooves collaborative administrators to comply with relevant state and federal regulations and to develop supportive relationships with relevant state, regional, and federal administrators.

2. Appropriate Geographic Scope.

The region must be designed to serve a specific school population. The area of operation must be large enough to permit the efficient development of most services that local school systems cannot provide for themselves.

3. Governing Structure Facilitating Achievement of Collaborative's Goals and Objectives.

Administrators of successful collaboratives state that the governing structure is the factor that is most likely to facilitate success. Structural relationships should be addressed at the time that a collaborative is initiated. This reduces later internal operational conflicts, and agency energies can be directed toward the population to be served. Regulatory and monitoring roles should be separated from service roles.

Initial board composition and procedures for turnover must be determined. Procedures should guarantee that rural districts will be equitably represented. Thus, in many instances the "one person one vote" principle of governance will not be appropriate.

The fiscal agent must be agreed upon as well as procedures for budget accountability. If districts are to rotate responsibility for serving as a fiscal agent, appropriate procedures for determining rotation must be determined. Procedures for the selection of any policy or advisory fiscal subcommittees must be determined and agreed upon.

The collaborative must have adequate and dependable financial support, with some degree of flexibility in the use of funds. The fiscal agent should have the budgetary authority required and should serve as the chief administrative officer of the region when regional personnel are hired, grant applications submitted, etc.

Costs of administering regional programs must be computed and procedures for determining membership, tuition, and ser-

vice costs agreed upon. Safeguards should be designed so that districts that contract for services for an upcoming fiscal year do so in time for the collaborative to hire the most qualified personnel available and to project its transportation and other costs.

A leader for the collaborative should be identified who is widely respected by member district respresentatives and those having political power. This individual should have the capability to effectively serve as spokesperson for the region.

Role clarification is essential to inhibit future role conflicts. Specific roles must be determined and formally agreed upon for the collaborative, member districts, collaborative staff, and district personnel regarding policy setting, decision-making, regulation and monitoring, technical assistance, service coordination, service delivery, staff hiring, staff evaluation, parent education/involvement, home visitation, public relations, and public education.

The goals and objectives of the collaboratives should offer a clear direction for the services to be provided and the approaches necessary to maintain the region's integrity. Policies must be consistent with goals and objectives, and management practices must be consistent with the legal operation of schools within the state. Procedures should be established for the clarification of policy, as needed.

4. Allowance for Divergent Goals of Each Unit of the Collaborative.

Although a collaborative must have some general goals and common purposes, it is essential that individual units have some autonomy and the opportunity to self select specific goals to which they are committed. Regional administrators should recognize that it is not required that members collaborate on all issues and that members will have individual interests and priorities. The collaborative should define areas in which members can cooperate and concentrate first on mutual interest projects. Some members of regional structures reported that that functioned best by organizing loose cooperatives within the global districts/agencies delivering distinctly different services. Thus, service domains were not threatened yet a greater number of needs were met.

5. Clear Procedures for Service Delivery.

Clearly established policies are important. Otherwise, turnover at the leadership level will result in nullification of many essential agreements that, common to the rural style, were strictly informal. Formal policies and procedures should be as consistent as possible with the informal organizational chart. It is also important that formal styles of operation,

when possible, remain consistent with rural values and norms (e.g., by not formalizing procedures when it is not necessary to do so).

6. Equitable Service Delivery Systems.

The collaborative referral system should be prioritized so that each contributing member, no matter what its size, receives its fair share of services. This typically does not occur when the "first come first served" philosophy (which also generally encourages overreferrals) is employed. The types of services to be offered should be based on documented needs. Services should, whenever possible, be located close to those receiving them.

7. Appropriate Lines of Staff Accountability.

Adequate consideration must be given to establishing effective relationships between the collaborative and each district in regular as well as special education matters. This includes the lines of accountability of all personnel hired by the collaborative to work with some or all of the districts involved. For example, it is wise to discuss guidelines for dividing service time for regional personnel among various duties and districts at an early stage. Some collaboratives find it effective to allocate district costs for regional staff on the basis of the amount of time involved in service delivery in a particular district. Other districts prefer that staff be paid on an equality split basis, no matter where services are delivered.

Another consideration involves clearly defining and incorporating the roles of special education teachers, directors, and parents currently operating in the geographic area to be served by the administrative functions of the region. The roles of regional superintendents should be defined in a way that allows their recommendations to become a functional part of the total operation. Staff role definitions should emphasize cooperation to accomplish service delivery.

Most school systems evaluate personnel and programs based on the amount of time spent in serving students and on student impact. Within a collaborative program, the press for accountability in these areas is even greater, since (a) cooperative units may each define differently what objectives are to be reached and the impact that the regional unit's staff should have, and (b) cooperating units wish to ascertain that their students are receiving their fair share of the regional unit's resources and programs. Thus, the staff in a cooperative program is accountable to more levels than staff in an individual school district and must report more than merely how time is spent and what educational impact is produced.

One large regional cooperative developed a computerized system to monitor the special education programs for low incidence handicapped children. The system contained a data base regarding the children served, the staff providing the services, and each specific service provided. The system cumulated the record of services provided and had a breakdown according to whom they were provided. This type of system allowed a diverse staff to geographically record how their time was expended with system components that could be individualized according to specific activity within the total system. Finally, it provided a method of reporting to each cooperative unit the quantity and types of services being provided. This also afforded economic savings in the preparation of necessary evaluations and reports.

No matter what accountability system is selected, attention should be given to ways of fairly observing staff and to determining exactly who is responsible for staff supervision. Methods of positive reinforcement and potential personnel retention methods should also be emphasized.

8. Effective Planning Based on Evaluation Data.

Information gathered from ongoing (formative) evaluation must be consistently used as input for planning. Member districts must recognize that some planning will thus be temporary so that appropriate adjustments can be made.

Accurate projections of disabilities in the region and associated future service and personnel needs, though difficult to obtain, are particularly useful for planning. This is especially important when regional boundaries are scheduled to shift (e.g., to include lower socioeconomic groups with attendant differences in handicapping conditions), when community population is expected to shift because of in- or out-migration, or when the roles of nearby residential schools are scheduled to shift because of trends of deinstitutionalizing individuals with severe disabilities.

Needs should continuously be assessed so that services can be developed and updated as needed. Needs assessments that simultaneously query respondents regarding potential program resources are particularly helpful.

9. Effective Communication Systems.

Districts and other members of collaboratives must have opportunities to share experiences and insights and to reflect upon their utility without endorsing "best" or "validated" solutions. Members must also be able to openly communicate regarding failures so that others can attempt to avoid repetitions of such.

10. Local District Responsibility for Special Education Services.

Collaborative special education services must be responsive to the needs and desires of local school systems, as seen from the local level. Larger districts within the collaborative cannot be allowed to dictate policy or program. Equally important, local districts must "own" the special education service delivery system. Shared decisionmaking, including participation in selection and supervision of regional personnel, will assist in increasing local commitment.

Services of the regional structure should be viewed as a supplement to the basic educational functions of local schools rather than usurping them. Authority as well as responsibility should be decentralized. This will involve local units sharing regional control responsibilities so that all needs are met.

Local ownership and commitment to special education services is enhanced by decentralization of services, particularly when this involves a real delegation of authority as well as responsibility. In fact, one of the most successful strategies involves the collaborative staff demanding that building principals be responsible for special education decisions made. (Some collaboratives will not allow district participation if school principals will not be responsible for decisions concerning special education services.) This practice facilitates mainstreaming because local administrators thus bear equal responsibility for handicapped and non-handicapped students. It also inhibits the common problem of districts viewing a collaborative program as a "dumping ground" for "problem students." Because local administrators are integrally involved in program development and implementation, regional staff are better understood when they call upon member districts to adapt programs and directions as circumstances and needs change. Regional services are also more stable, in spite of changes and realignments among participating local school districts.

11. Appropriate Involvement of the Public in Decision Making.

Any rural agenda, program, or policies should be derived with the benefit of input from the rural constituency. Processes such as involving representatives of the community, parent, private school, mental health agency, and other relevant regional groups on advisory and program planning committees will ensure that local community needs and cultural values are recognized as programs are planned. This will inhibit resistance to change, generate community and professional support and therefore facilitate program success.

NRP interviews of students with disabilities and their families indicated that such a process is felt to enhance program accountability to students with disabilities.

Informal communication systems in rural America are extremely effective. Astute regional program administrators involve key communicators in school district activities and provide them with accurate information for their dissemination.

12. Creation of Local Support for Change.

Local community support for expanded or changed special education services is essential. Collaborative administrators must create local support for change across the region so that local school agendas do not conflict with those of the collaborative.

Rural school leaders are usually products of their communities and are very sensitive to local values and expectations. Local citizens typically expect their schools to be informal, accessible, and to conserve existing local values. In fact, studies have consistently found that rural communities are resistant to change and that district administrators, lacking local political support, will be reluctant to become involved in activities to bring about or accommodate change (Nachtigal, 1982, Helge, 1981).

Member districts, affiliated agencies, and parents and other community members in the region should be involved in planning special education improvements and changes and must be continuously educated concerning how their constituencies will be better served.

Regional staff should strive to become part of the communities they serve, even if they are only occasional visitors. They should attempt to learn about local power and communication systems and to effectively use such knowledge. Expressing interest in community needs other than special education and offering to assist with regular as well as special education activities are examples of ways that "outsiders" can begin to be better accepted by being perceived as persons interested in the total community. Regional staff who have adopted these strategies sometimes find that their "temporary quarters" are made more appropriate for therapy or instruction, that parents tend to show up more frequently for conferences, and that their advice is more readily accepted.

13. Collaboration with Agencies External to Collaborative.

Inter-agency as well as intra-agency collaboration is advisable. Rural districts are usually isolated but operate best when using resources of all other possible rural agencies. It is advisable to link rural development and rural education efforts when possible. This is particularly true because agencies other than schools are required to address the complex problems of education which are embedded in the broad issues of poverty, high unemployment and underemploy-

ment, economic decline, legislative discrimination, and high in- or out-migration.

14. Realistic and Effective Intra-Agency Collaboration.

Realistic perspectives should be set regarding inter-agency collaboration and district motivations to become involved in a collaborative. The realities of unequal resources, emerging conflicts and struggles toward dominance, the effects of external changes and policies upon the collaborative, mandated decisions, screening of information shared, struggles toward domainance and control, and loyalties to local school boards or higher administrative units must be recognized. Basic structural conflicts are best dealt with at the time that the collaborative is organized, and other conflicts should be confronted as they emerge. Astute administrators will guard against the potential that units with inadequate resources and expertise be forced into defensive postures, in cases when collaboration is mandated.

If rural populations, especially school districts, are polarized, mutual projects may be doomed to failure because acceptance by one group ensures rejection by the other. The collaborative's goal should be to foster a sense of non-competitive cooperation, so that organizations can share resources, successes, and information about failures. Serious attempts should be made to identify spheres of expertise, avoiding intra-organizational jealousies.

It should not be assumed that the collaborative's activities will be all-encompassing. Rather open debates should occur reading each proposed activity. Collaborative members should question whether a service does not need to be formalized or can best be handled at the local level.

15. Facilitation of Parent Involvement.

Services should be delivered as close to the student's home as possible and parents should have meaningful input regarding service methods and location. Staff vs. student travel should be considered. This may include innovative proven techniques such as involving local private pilots who will voluntarily transport staff at no charge. Technical alternatives such as instruction by satellite or remote computer should also be considered.

Local parent involvement is also important when students are not served in the immediate area. Local parent education and support groups can be supplemented by home visits.

16. Emphasis on Retention of Qualified Personnel.

As itinerant staff experience unique professional frustrations and are difficult to retain, astute administrators carefully improve their environments. Physical facilities should be as appropriate and pleasant as possible and needed equipment should be available. At least as important (according to staff retention statistics), local building personnel should accept the itinerant as an ongoing part of their program and understand their unique roles. Local administrators can assist in establishing a local peer support system and making successful contacts with local parents. Temporary role exchanges have been found useful as have interdisciplinary teaming and involving itinerants in local meetings and activities.

Itinerants should become aware of local power and communication structures, express interest in general as well as special education activities, if possible, and attend community functions.

The investment of such time is important for gaining the support of local staff and parents.

Alternatives to the professional "down time" of travel should be pursued (e.g., listening to educational cassettes, recording reports, varying travel schedules, using technological alternatives for remote service delivery/feedback, or planning interdisciplinary team evaluations).

Competent staff should be made to feel professionally secure through clear reward structures, administrative and peer support, and the awareness of career ladders within or external to the collaborative.

17. Comprehensive Staff Development Programs.

Kirmer, et.al. (1984) outlined a successful process of staff development within collaboratives which included in-service for regular educators and administrators as well as for special educators. In concert with interdisciplinary teaming, this strategy emphasized that all professionals are required for effective service delivery. Kirmer, et.al. (1984) also stressed the importance of trainees working in building teams with the relevant program coordinator clarifying the missions of itinerant staff.

Staff development must be an ongoing systematic process of confronting problems. Experiences should be as individualized as necessary since the collaborative will consistently have new staff and personnel with widely diverse responsibilities. All potential resources should be used ranging from university or community college courses to peer instruction. Because of the remote locations of many school personnel, the use of advanced technologies such as two-way use of educational satellities, exchanges of videodiscs for instruction/feedback, or simpler audiocommunications will be necessary.

18. Creative Uses of Advanced Technologies.

Advanced technologies are particularly helpful where the sharing of personnel and programs is impeded by vast distances to cover, few children with similar needs, unique cultures to be served, and climatic problems.

Appropriate technological alternatives include remote electronic instruction (e.g., from a district to another district, collaborative headquarters, or university practicum), mobile computer labs used for particular services or course subjects, two-way television courses, telephone hook-ups, and video/cassette tape feedback. Collaboratives can use advanced technologies for instructional support, parent involvement, management, staff development, or instruction. Potential uses are limited primarily by the imaginations of planners.

CONCLUSIONS

This document has discussed the types, benefits, and problems of educational collaboratives. Research-based strategies for enhancing regional service delivery have been described.

Coalitions of professional organizations are a trend of the future, and the trend is toward more educational collaboratives in all but a few states. Rural educational collaboratives should be developed or improved in ways consistent with forecasts of futuristic societal trends. These will include true delegation of authority as well as responsibility, and an emphasis on networking groups of agencies and individuals for problem solving. Innovative uses of advanced technologies will be particularly advantageous in areas in which geography and climate pose barriers to service delivery or collaboration.

As illustrated in this report, educational collaboratives can have positive or negative impacts on service delivery. Thus it is essential that regional services are designed to be consistent with local value systems of the rural communities in which they will be delivered. Local involvement in planning, implementation, and feedback are imperative; and it is important that regional structures are as informally accessible as they are impartially available.

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